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God's Gangs: Barrio Ministry, Masculinity and Gang Recovery. New York: New York University Press, 2014. Pp. xiii +229. Pb, \$26.

In 2009, one in every thirty-one adults in the USA—some 7.3 million—was incarcerated or on probation (75). It is self-evident that we need transformative knowledge of projects and programs addressing the dynamics of criminality, imprisonment, restitution, reformation, and rehabilitation.

Flores provides a much needed exploration of the role of religion and grass-roots religious institutions in helping young men who move from the hyper-masculinity of the streets to a more humane and transformative masculinity that includes fatherhood and family as they “recover” (10) from the vicissitudes of gang life. Too often social scientists display academe’s knee-jerk animosity to religious belief, and so misunderstand, ignore, or excoriate the efforts of faith-based institutions to ameliorate certain aspects of social reality. In *barrios* and streets, far from ivy-covered walls, churches and missions are often the only viable social bodies to which people in need can turn.

Full disclosure: like Greg Boyle, one of the main subjects of the study, I too am a Jesuit priest, and I lived and worked in a Jesuit parish in Camden, New Jersey for fifteen years. The neighborhood was characterized by much of what Flores chronicles in this vibrant ethnography of men whose lives have been transformed through the work of two Los Angeles’s missions to gang members: Homeboy Industries (founded 1986) and Victory Outreach (founded 1967).

Flores spent over eighteenth months (June 2008–December 2009) with men engaging in transition from gang life to “reformed *barrio* masculinity” (2), closely shadowing and interviewing thirty-four informants (a quite respectable number for ethnographic research of this type) (21). He utilizes, while questioning the adequacy of, “segmented assimilation theory” (10), and argues that “a theoretical gap exists in understanding how religion can empower previously delinquent youths in early adulthood” (16). On the basis of his investigations, Flores posits that small, religiously-based organizations can help young males overcome destructive, and often death-dealing, hyper masculinity and “reorient Chicano gang members away from the street and toward the household” (10).

Chapter One, "The Latino Crime Threat" highlights and dissects the inherent insanity and 'color-blind' racism of "get tough on crime" initiatives, like Los Angeles's Operation Hammer (54 ff.)—inept policing methods that swell prison populations, but do very little to reduce crime, especially illegal drug activity. The second chapter covers the current literature on the dynamics, challenges, and changes of immigration patterns and processes over the past several decades.

Chapter Three gets into the heart of the book, "Recovery from Gang Life" (88 ff.). Flores compares and contrasts the methods of Homeboy Industries and Victory Outreach, noting the different influences of Homeboys' Catholic currents and Victory's Pentecostal-evangelical flavors.

Chapter Four chronicles the lives of eight men as they strive to recover from gang life and ways of being. With the ethnographer's characteristic sympathetic listening ear, Flores reveals the lives of these men, giving the reader real and deep understanding of, and appreciation for, their struggles.

Interestingly, Chapter Five, "Masculinity and the Podium," investigates the ways "reform from gang life is not an individual effort, but is rather negotiated through social interaction" (147). "Rubrics of 'Recovery,' 'Restoration' and 'Rehabilitation'" underlie the ways "gendered redemption sequences operate as a discursive process" (148–149), as well as how and "the rituals of verbal communication allow for recovering gang members' social reintegration" (157). All this is social scientific speak for recognizing that gang members meeting and talking, in religious atmospheres, calls them to be their deepest, truest selves, and helps them find the strength, courage, and grace to change their lives permanently.

Chapter Six, "From Shaved to Saved" realizes that real personal change often is constituted by embodied transformations. Tattoo removal, sartorial style changes, and other such decisions, are often meaningful signals of becoming an exemplar of "reformed *barrio* masculinity" (175 ff).

With 152,000 documented gang members in Los Angeles (2), understanding how to address and facilitate the integration of former gang members into society is crucial, timely, and much needed. This book's documentary efforts make a strong contribution to

conceptualizing how small, intimate, personally caring organizations based in faith traditions, can transform lives, cultures, and societies.

This is a fine book for college-level sociology, criminal justice, and cultural anthropology courses. Further ethnographic research into how women (mothers, sisters, girlfriends, and wives) interact and facilitate the transformations Flores studies will be welcome as the field progresses. The small amount of academic jargon he uses (in order to establish his academic "street cred") can hopefully be jettisoned as he reveals more of the truly heroic efforts these men and their families to become promoters and sustainers of family and society.

To incarcerate a person in the United States of America costs somewhere between \$50,000 to \$60,000 a year. On August 23, 2013, Marc Santora reported in *The New York Times* that it costs \$168,00 annually for each inmate imprisoned by the city of New York. According to the Vera Institute of Justice, the United States, though only six percent of the world's population, accounts for over twenty-five percent of the world's prisoners, and spends \$63.4 billion each year in taxpayer dollars keeping its citizens behind bars (CBS NEWS reporting on the Vera Institute of Justice report [<http://www.cbsnews.com/news/the-cost-of-a-nation-of-incarceration>]).

Victory Outreach and Homeboy Industries are better options by far. The astronomical costs of imprisoning millions of our brothers and sisters can be lowered drastically by operations like Homeboy Industries, whose annual budget runs \$9.8 million (6). It would cost many, many times that amount to imprison the numbers Homeboy Industries, with their well known motto "Jobs not Jails," rehabilitates and reintegrates.

Greg Boyle, S.J. says that if we treated one another as kin, we would see a great deal more justice. It is time to see those in prison as our sisters and brothers. Flores's study goes a long way to helping us all do just that.

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